DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 125 278 FL 007 708

AUTHOR Fryer, T. Bruce
TITLE Foreign Language and Business. A Lifelong Experience.
PUB DATE Oct 75
NOTE 11p.; Revision of a paper presented at the meeting of the Southeast Conference on Language Teaching (New Orleans, Louisiana, October 1975)

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.83 HC-$1.67 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Business Administration; College Programs; Continuous Learning; Cultural Awareness; *Cultural Factors; Foreign Culture; French; German; Graduate Study; Intensive Language Courses; International Education; Internship Programs; Job Skills; *Language Instruction; Language Skills; Learning Processes; Managerial Occupations; *Masters Degrees; Portuguese; *Professional Training; Second Language Learning; Spanish; Study Abroad
IDENTIFIERS *International Business

ABSTRACT

The Masters Degree in International Business Program at the University of South Carolina, begun in June 1974, has as its unique feature the emphasis on "lifelong experience." This emphasis affects both the student and the department. From the first year of the program (the basic features of which are intensive training in language, culture, and business, as well as internship abroad), students are exposed to facts of life relating to foreign language, culture, and business. It is believed that their learning experience will enable the students to work successfully in multi-national firms in the U.S., to transfer their learning skills to another language, and to adjust to other learning situations. The effects of the program on the Department of Foreign Languages are: to create more jobs, to stimulate cooperation among different departments, and hopefully to heighten interest in the foreign language requirement as a useful tool. For the high school teacher, the program implies: the need to inform students and native speakers of a foreign language of the possibilities for those skilled in foreign languages; the importance of cultural education in high schools; and the need for the student to understand his learning processes. (AM)

****
* Documents acquired by ERIC include many informal unpublished *
* materials not available from other sources. ERIC makes every effort *
* to obtain the best copy available. Nevertheless, items of marginal *
* reproducibility are often encountered and this affects the quality *
* of the microfiche and hardcopy reproductions ERIC makes available *
* via the ERIC Document Reproduction Service (EDRS). EDRS is not *
* responsible for the quality of the original document. Reproductions *
* supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made from the original. *
****

ED125278

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

FOREIGN LANGUAGES AND BUSINESS

A LIFELONG EXPERIENCE

T. Bruce Fryer

The University of South Carolina

The life of the Masters Degree in International Business Program (MIBS) began for students in June of 1974. Thus, for many individuals, a lifelong career involving business and foreign languages with multinational firms was initiated. For many of these students, a foreign language or foreign languages will be a lifelong experience. A recent survey of 80 MIBS students in their first summer of the program at The University of South Carolina (including students of French, German, Portuguese, Spanish and English as a Second Language) indicated that 62% of the students expected to use their foreign language training OFTEN during their careers.

FL007708

What are the initial indications from the first year and one-half of a program of this nature? Dr. Elizabeth Joiner[1] has referred to the effects of such a program on the life of a college professor trained in the humanities. In addition to the effects on the college faculty, the program has had tremendous influence on the students as we shall soon discuss. A third factor is the effect of such a program on the life of the department. My intent in this paper will be to describe the beginnings of the lifelong experiences for the student as well as for the foreign language department. In doing this, the following items will be described:

1) The life-line in the development and implementation of MIBS from the summer of 1974 to the present.

2) The effects of the training on the students in the program

3) The possible implications of such a program for college foreign language departments and for high school foreign language teachers.

4) The possible implications of such a program for high school foreign language teachers.

LIFE-LINE OF MIBS

The development of the MIBS program at The University of South Carolina is described in detail in an article by Drs. Fitz Beasley, Randy Folks, and Gerda Jordan in the Journal of International Business in the spring of 1975.[2] My brief outline serves only as an introduction to the program for the purpose of providing an overview.

During the first summer session of 1974, students accepted for the MIBS program were requested to select one of two tracks--German or Spanish. During that summer, they received intensive training in their chosen language for ten weeks. The objectives of the programs were twofold--progress in the four language skills and cultural adaptation skills.

The training in the four language skills followed normal procedures appropriate for intensive language programs. One interesting phenomenon which developed spontaneously was that cultural differences between the two language tracks became apparent through the natural evolution of the structures and administration of the two tracks. Whereas the German program was coordinated by one central director and reflected rigid organization, the Spanish program was more loosely coordinated by three separate individuals, present speaker included, each

one managing one-third of the program. Each Spanish coordinator was provided with two graduate assistants to work with. This organization was comparable to having three "caudillos"; each responsible for his portion and each having his own band of followers. No criticism or praise of one program or another is to be imputed here. The point is made only to demonstrate that neophyte students of language had been introduced in the first few weeks of language training not only to linguistic differences, but also to cultural realities which they would face in the future. Their lifelong experience in the foreign language had begun.

The First Year, 1974-75

In the fall following the intensive summer, students enrolled in a two semester program in a Unified Business Program. During this time, students were exposed to a program devoted almost entirely to the acquisition of business knowledge and skills which was conducted in English by the business faculty. The foreign language component was maintained for a total of three semester hours based on three hours contact per week for a full nine-month period. The result of this organization was a situation predictable to anyone who has observed bilingual situations or to anyone who has studied the results of research conducted by Leopold in this country or Ronjat in France in the earlier part of this century. After studying their bilingual children, both researchers realized that the language most in use for cognitive operations becomes the dominant language of that individual. In the case of the MIBS, where the majority of the work is conducted in English, English becomes the dominant language. The language skills of the MIBS student did not increase significantly during this period.

Thus we observe another phenomenon readily observeable to the MIBS student in his lifelong experience--if a language is to remain functional, it must be kept active at more than a superficial level.

Summer II, 1975

The summer of 1975 marked the second summer in the program for the initial students of Spanish and German. Three new tracks were also made available to new students in this summer in French, Portuguese, and English as a Second Language for foreign students. Additionally, new groups of Spanish and German were admitted. The students of Spanish and German in their second summer received training in the culture, geography, history and civilization of the two target countries, Germany and Colombia, South America.

Before going to the country in July, some of these students had an initial encounter with officials from the foreign country via the Consulate. In Spanish, the students planning to go to Colombia were required to go to Charlotte, North Carolina to meet personally with the Colombian consul. They were interviewed and had to pass through considerable red tape. This served as an introduction to some of the difficulties a multi-national manager might need to be concerned with. Once again, a further step in the lifelong experience for foreign language and business.

Summer 1975, Abroad

In July of 1975, students were flown to the country for a continuation of language training offered by private institutions in Colombia and Germany.

Although, I personally did not accompany either group, in talking to the directors of both of these sessions, Dr. Wolfgang Elfe in German and Dr. Nestor Moreno in Spanish and in talking with the students upon their return, they experienced cultural and linguistic shock upon arrival in the country. This is not to say that they were not prepared well before going. It does point out, however, the near inevitability of preparing someone for this shock. Many students for the first time, realized the true importance of their training in the language and culture.

During the second summer, students had the opportunity to study language intensively in communication situations, to travel throughout the respective countryside, and to talk with officials in business and industry. This gave them insight into the type of tasks they would need to be able to complete and the problems they needed to be able to solve.

The Second Academic Year 1975-1976

Following the summer in the foreign country, the students were interviewed by firms in which they had been placed and began their internship. This internship is one of the outstanding features of the MIBS Program at USC in addition to the heavy emphasis placed on language skills. While it is too early to describe the total life experience of students now working with firms abroad, it is safe to say that they have adjusted to the life up to this point.

In summary, the life-line of the MIBS Program from Summer 1974 to Fall 1975 indicates that many students followed normally predictable routes for the initial stages in any life-long learning experience. The following examples can be summerized: 1) The first summer, many students reflected unawareness of the importance that a language would

play in their career, and demonstrated resistance to foreign language in some cases, not to mention apathy, and cultural alienation. Despite the fact that they were enrolled in a program of this nature, some were unable to cope with the pressures and dropped out. Comments like, "Well I'm a business major and you liberal art students just wait until the fall" were silenced when this type of student dropped out.

Native speakers working in the first summer were appalled at the disdain some students held, let us say, for Latin American customs. This years group is better. 2) During the first year there was a "leveling off in linguistic development" due to the physical and mental involvement in developing business skills. This is to be expected. Finally, 3) cultural shock develops despite preparation. These are normal and predictable language experiences. Will this experience provide them with the skills to continue to interlaced language and business? I think so:

1) I believe many will return to the U. S., rich for their experience, and will be able to enter multi-national firms in this country.
2) Because they have had the experience, they may not necessarily enter the field using the language they were trained in, but rather, they may need to apply their LANGUAGE LEARNING EXPERIENCES to learn other languages. In other words, the process of their experience is even more important than the specific context.
3) They should be better able to cope with our "womb-to-tomb" learning society because of their linguistic and cultural experience. That is, they will be able to adjust to more learning situations successfully because of what they have seen

and done.

EFFECTS ON THE DEPARTMENT OF FOREIGN LANGUAGES

As Dr. Elizabeth Joiner has pointed out, humanists may need to adapt. What effect has MIBS had on the foreign language department? As a foreign language educator, teacher trainer, I can say that it has limited the development of teacher training workshops in the summer, but perhaps that is as it should be since the profession has been complaining about the oversupply of teachers.

2) It has provided employment for university foreign language instructors who might not otherwise have been able to be employed. In German, for example, 13 people were employed in the summer of 1974 in Part I, and in Spanish 9 people were employed. With decreasing foreign language enrollments, this has been a blessing, particularly in German.

3) At the undergraduate level, French offers a Business Conversation course. Hopefully this might lead into further cooperation for majors and cognates between the two departments.

4) The emphasis our College of Business has placed on the language portions of their program reaffirms the need for the inclusion of foreign languages in the undergraduate curriculum. Those students with the foreign language skills are sought often by other students who do not have these skills.

5) The fact that a multi- or inter- disciplinary program can be successful, adds to the possibility for increasing other such ventures within the university community.

6) Hopefully, at the graduate level, it will encourage the foreign language department to re-examine with other departments the real purpose for a language requirement as a useful tool and not a dreaded hurdle.

7) Our department, as well as many others, feel the challenge to maintain the integrity of our academic disciplines (which we must do) as well as to pursue such other avenues of development which keep us alive!

The implications for high school teachers are as follows:

1) The need to make high school students aware that such possibilities do exist for those who develop language skills and are able to maintain them.
2) The need to make native speakers aware that such possibilities exist and that the path could be more clearly defined for their access into the world of business.
3) A program of this nature reaffirms the importance of communication through the four language skills and the importance of cultural differences for inclusion in the high school curriculum.
4) More emphasis needs to be placed on the process of learning in high school programs. That is, a student should learn how he learns a foreign language best and how he can assimilate cultural differences and make adjustments.

We need to maintain our interest in the past which the humanities emphasize. However, we also need to assist students to do as Michael A. McDaniel suggests in Alvin Toffler's book, Learning for Tomorrow,[3] and focus on education about change as well as to assist students to anticipate and deal with change. Many of the MBS students could not cope with these changes and were dropped from the program.

The foreign language curriculum could have as much to offer students in these areas because of the cultural factors implicit in our discipline. The challenge is to assist students in coping with upcoming shifts within and without our society. We should and could be leaders

in these developments in our schools. As political allegiances shift, as international alliances transfer. as the international economic situation varies, we need to be aiding our students to cope with these changes. Let's accept the challenge.

FOOTNOTES

[1]Elizabeth G. Joiner, "The Retraining of Humanists for Programs in International Business," (paper presented at Southern Conference on Language Teaching, Atlanta, Georgia, 1975).

[2]G. F. Beasley, William R. Folks, and Gerda Jordan, "Development and Initiation of a Masters in International Business" Journal of International Business, spring, 1975.

[3]Michael A. McDanield, "Tomorrow's Curriculum Today," in Alvin Toffler, ed., Learning for Tomorrow, Vintage Books: New York, 1974.